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Economic News from Abroad

Anti Cartel Moves in ECSC

First moves to abolish cartel practices have been announced by the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community. The Ruhr Coal Sales Office is to be reorganized on the basis of three independent sales bodies. The French Government also agreed to free French wholesale traders from their obligation to buy a fixed quota of French coal before importing from other countries. Some other monopoly practices have also been banned. These moves have been agreed upon in view of the present shortage of coal and steel and the prospect of these industries expanding by about 10 per cent in the next two or three years.

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THE General Convention of Ha-

maashbir, the cooperative movement,

will open tomorrow in the

celebration of the 25th anni-

versary of Ha-

maashbir. This will also be an

occasion for appraising its achieve-

ments and for discussing its

problems and future. The

convention has been an annual

event since its inception in 1932,

but the last one took place in 1952,

so that many of the delegates

arise which will be put on the

agenda. Ha-

maashbir's position in the

cooperative movement should

also occupy the delegates' atten-

tion in view of the recent ten-

dency to challenge its central

command. Moreover, the econ-

omic climate in this country has

changed considerably and the

consumers' cooperative movement

must adapt itself to new tasks.

Against this background, the

preliminary work for the con-

vention has been rather sketchy.

The two main slogans talked

about in public have been, first

the merger of the (retail) Ha-

maashbir with the (wholesale)

Consumers Cooperative Union in

order to streamline activities and

avoid duplication, and, second,

an imposing industrialization

programme running into some

10,000. Both of these, however,

are of dubious practicality.

The merger proposal comes

only as a result of friction be-

tween the two organizations,

which cannot, however, be cured

by mechanical means. The con-

sumers' cooperatives have long

since outgrown the status of local

branches and have set up a

number of their own branches

and financial bodies in which the

parent Ha-

maashbir participates, but without a decisive voice. The

cooperative since Ha-

maashbir's turnover, which serves as a

basis for representation on Ha-

maashbir's council, is also con-

tinually growing and already ap-

proaches 50 per cent. Their in-

terests do not always coincide

with those of the kibbutzim and

the smallholders of which Ha-

maashbir is one of the other major

groups in Ha-

maashbir, and an

outright merger would perhaps

raise more awkward questions

than it would solve.

Active participation in various

industrial ventures has always

been one of the main features of

Ha-

maashbir's cap. By the end of

1954, it was part owner of 53 fac-

ilities with a total investment (at

original prices) of 11,500, and an

output of 51m. (in 1954). Of these

facilities were nine factories—in-

cluding cement and brick—entirely

owned by Ha-

maashbir, and its

direct and indirect investment

reached about 11,500. Neverthe-

less, it is not altogether clear

how these investments—profitable

though they may be from the

business point of view—con-

tribute to the attainment of Ha-

maashbir's special goals. On the

contrary, it has been argued that

by diverting itself to liquid ac-

tivities, in order to build up an

industrial empire, Ha-

maashbir has failed to concentrate